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# The Truth about Lies: The Relationship between Fiction and Reality in Abbas Kiarostami's *Certified Copy*

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Résultat de mes errances  
Quelques petits sentiers  
Pour les marcheurs

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*Un loup aux aguets*  
ABBAS KIAROSTAMI<sup>1</sup>

In the last decade or so, the dichotomy between originals and fakes, as well as the concomitant notions of truth and lies, has come to renewed prominence with the increasing availability of replication in writing, in visual images and in sound—not to mention the opening up of distribution channels facilitated by the Internet and cheaper means of transport around the world. Copies, counterfeits and forgeries of all kinds (from fake Rolex watches to potentially dangerous fake medicines) are common practice. In parallel, various highly technical means of detecting fakes have increased, resulting in a number of high-profile law suits and the development of complex mechanisms to protect intellectual property. In the realm of art, the National Gallery in London staged an exhibition entitled *Close Examination: Fakes, Mistakes and Discoveries* in 2010, where the viewers were introduced to the high-tech devices currently used to ascertain the attribution of a work of art—presumably in an attempt to reassure the public that what they are shown is the ‘real thing’. Beyond the obvious financial stakes lurks the philosophical question which exercises Philippe Sollers in his novel *La Fête à Venise* (1991): what would happen if museum exhibits were all fake? In an interview, Sollers comments:

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<sup>1</sup>(Kiarostami, *Loup* 9) ["The product of my musings / A few narrow pathways / For the wanderers"]. Kiarostami writes and speaks in Farsi. All quotes from him in French or in English were first mediated by a translator or an interpreter. Unless specified otherwise, all subsequent translations are our own.

Parce que les gens sont expropriés de leurs propres sensations, de leurs propres réflexions. S'ils ne savent plus lire, s'ils ne savent plus regarder, s'ils ne savent plus sentir, ou s'ils ne savent plus s'observer en train de sentir, leur force de résistance, de révolte ou de contestation s'amoindrit. [ . . . ] [J]e prends la peinture, et ce qui est en train d'arriver à la peinture, sa confiscation [ . . . ] (je parle des originaux; du fait qu'on pourrait très bien [ . . . ] étant donné les modes de reproduction perfectionnés [ . . . ], transformer un musée: mettre des reproductions et rafler les originaux, je pense que c'est tout à fait possible). Il y a là la volonté de s'approprier un certain trésor de savoir-faire et de sensations humaines, qui désormais appartiendra aux Maîtres. ("La Fête à Venise")

[Because people are now alienated from their own feelings, from their own thoughts. If they no longer know how to read, how to see, how to feel, if they are no longer able to reflect on their feelings, their ability to resist, to fight, or to protest declines. Take paintings for example and what is currently happening to them, the way their function is currently usurped. I am referring to the original works of art. It would be perfectly feasible, given the high definition of today's reprographics means, for the powers that be to alter the nature of museums and hang reproductions instead of originals. There is a will from the Masters of the world to keep for themselves the font of the artists' savoir faire and the variety of human experiences their works generate.]

In other words, this thirst for authenticity in works of art is no snobbery, nor is it essentially a way of ensuring the commercial value of the artefact. In Plato's words "all these poetical individuals, beginning with Homer, are only imitators; they copy images of virtue and the like, but the truth they never reach" (*The Republic*, bk.10). An emanation from a unique individual, a bridge both between the artist and the viewer and between viewers themselves, art is therefore vital for recognition of what lies at the heart of the human condition and any denial of this endangers the free world. Hence the need to trust the authenticity of a given piece of art, to trust that it represents an individual's original creation for a meaningful connection to take place.

In film-making, as with other arts, especially in the case of *auteur* cinema, it is crucial for audiences to engage with an individual's vision, although many hands are at work in the very complex processes involved (see Joly). This is explained, for example, by the director of *Certified Copy* (2010), Abbas Kiarostami, an artist par excellence, what the eighteenth century would have called a polymath, in turn a film-maker, painter, poet, photographer and opera director:<sup>2</sup>

L'universalité ne nous vient que si on est profondément ancré chez soi, dans sa propre terre, dans sa propre langue, dans sa propre famille. On se nourrit de son berceau et c'est forcément ce qui apparaît aussi dans le travail que l'on peut faire. [ . . . ] L'essence humaine est unique [ . . . ]. On sait qu'à

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<sup>2</sup>See Kiarostami's haiku-like poetry in *Avec le vent*, in *Un loup aux aguets*, and in *Havres*; his book of photographs *Pluie et vent* and the photo exhibition *Abbas Kiarostami—Photographic Overture* at the Purdy Hicks Gallery (26–30 May 2009); see also his production of *Così fan tutte* for the English National Opera in May 2009.

partir du moment où on exprime quelque chose de la souffrance humaine, du sentiment humain, il trouvera nécessairement un écho, une résonance, une empathie chez d'autres personnes issues d'autres cultures, d'autres contextes [ . . . ]. ("Copie conforme")

[Universality is only reached when artists individually are solidly anchored within themselves, within their own land of origin, their own language, their own family. Human nature is unique but the artists know that if they express something of human suffering, of human feelings, they will definitely find an echo, a resonance, an empathy with other people from other cultures and other contexts.]

It is our view that Kiarostami's latest film contributes to current questioning of the value of art, of the relationship between reality and fiction, between truth and lies, and of the role cinema in general and this film in particular can play in these debates.

Even a cursory look at Kiarostami's previous works shows that the making a work of art is a central theme. For example, *Close-up* (1990), *Life and Nothing more . . .* (1992), *Through the Olive Trees* (1994), *The Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) all feature a film-maker (invariably a Kiarostami look-alike such as Keshavarz in *Through the Olive Trees* or Behzad in *The Wind Will Carry Us*) either in the process of shooting a film or coming back to the location of a previous film. In each case, filming is always shown as a hands-on activity, a craft which requires both perception and hard work. We see the film-maker as the perfect exemplar of Alain's description of artists as "percevant[s] et actif[s], artisan[s] toujours en cela" (237) ["acutely aware of the world around them, active artisans"]. For instance, as the film-maker uses an array of weird and wonderful technical implements and spends a long time observing life in the village, the inhabitants in *The Wind Will Carry Us* mistake him for an engineer. After all, who else but a technician—a close relative of Kafka's surveyor from *Das Schloss* [*The Castle*—would come to this remote place all the way from Tehran?

As for *Certified Copy*, the boundaries of the surveyor's landscape seem at odds with what Kiarostami's viewers would normally expect. Indeed, at first glance the film may appear to be a 'fake' Kiarostami, since he usually sets his films in his native Iran and not in sunny Tuscany, as *Certified Copy* is. Normally Kiarostami's films are made with non-professional actors whom he trains on the job; the central characters tend to be a million miles away from the European bohemian bourgeois who are wont to congregate in northern Italy; his female characters are not normally played by Lanvin-dressed megastars wearing bright red lipstick, like Juliette Binoche does in *Certified Copy*. Music does not feature prominently in his previous works, yet Kiarostami insisted on its use in several scenes in *Certified Copy* and specifically traditional Tuscan folk music, presumably in a bid to add authenticity to the film location. Likewise, the sound of church bells punctuates the scenes, giving a sense of the real Tuscan atmosphere in which the film was made. However, despite such differences, *Certified Copy* ultimately reveals itself to be a 'true' Kiarostami, as the film-maker himself acknowledges:

Ce film est à la fois très différent de ce que j'ai fait auparavant et à la fois très similaire. Je suis comme un sculpteur qui a toujours travaillé le bois et qui cette fois s'est mis en tête de travailler le bronze. Tous les ingrédients sont différents, les acteurs, la langue, les lieux, tout est différent et pourtant ce qui ne varie pas, c'est le regard du créateur. ("En direct")

[This film is very different from all I have done so far, and at the same time, very similar. I am like a sculptor who has always been working with wood but who, on this occasion, has chosen to work with bronze. All the ingredients are different, the actors, the language, the location, everything is different and yet, what does not change is the author's perspective.]

What was merely a passing theme in previous Kiarostami's films now occupies the very heart of *Certified Copy*. The male lead character is James Miller, a British art critic. The film opens with the launch of his latest book in a new Italian translation. In a rather stilted scene (a long take focusing on an empty desk and chair), Miller, speaking in English, refers at the start of the film to his "concern about originality and the notion of the false and the genuine". This is a preoccupation dealt with in the film's very construction, and at all levels. Indeed, *Certified Copy* not only serves as the title of the film, but is also the name of the book originally written in English by Miller, thereby suggesting that the former is an adaptation of the latter. The beginning plunges the viewer into a *mise en abyme* which will be replicated throughout the film. Jokingly but nevertheless provocatively, Miller suggests that a better title for his book might have been "Forget the original, just get a good copy". He starts his presentation speech by referring to copies of works of art which are not to be dismissed, since "far from debasing it, copies pay tribute to the original". In many ways this exhortation echoes Walter Benjamin's seminal essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), which analyses the original works of art's loss of 'aura' in an age when reproductions have become ubiquitous, relegating authenticity to an irrelevant criterion for their evaluation. When focusing specifically on films, Benjamin highlights how they can promote "a revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art. [ . . . ] [T]he film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action" (231, 235). In this respect, what *Certified Copy* exemplifies is that copies—especially certified ones which succeed in expressing the essence of the original—generate in viewers the desire to embark on a journey leading to the original itself, allowing them to experience emotions akin to catharsis in classical theatre. *Certified Copy* enacts this journey through the portrayal of the ups and downs, over a single afternoon, of the relationship between Miller and a French gallery owner who stocks copies of Roman art, as well as originals (themselves, in a way, replicas of Greek artefacts). Throughout the film, as the camera follows the couple's meanderings in what is presented to us as the small medieval village of Lucignano, viewers are unable to ascertain whether the two have just met at the author's book signing or whether they are (or were) husband and wife.

It is this open-endedness, combined with the recurrent pattern of a route strewn with diverse obstructions, which characterises Kiarostami's art and which in *Certified Copy* allows us to draw the conclusion that we are watching a 'true' Kiarostami. Examples of this pattern abound in his filmography. In *Life and Nothing more . . .*, a film-maker, accompanied by his son attempts to go back to the northern region of Iran after the 1990 earthquake to see if he can find and help the non-professional actors he had worked with in the previous film he shot there. Unsurprisingly, his journey to the mountain village of Koker in a run-down family car unsuitable for the terrain, turns out to be a veritable assault course: there is pandemonium on the mountain roads, which have been nearly destroyed; there have been landslides, so the remaining cars are having to fight their way round countless obstacles and the survivors do the best they can to keep going in the face of adversity. In this mayhem, the film-maker's *idée fixe* is to find out the answer to his oft-repeated question: "Is the road ahead open?"<sup>3</sup> None of the locals is able to indicate the direction with enough precision to allow him to orientate himself. The viewer never finds out whether the characters finally reach their intended destination. Visually, the earthquake in *Life and Nothing more . . .*, tearing open both the earth and the hearts of its inhabitants, is a potent metaphor for Kiarostami's filmic technique and concern—as also at play in *Certified Copy*. Kiarostami himself defines the way in which he constructs filmic reality as a natural flow around obstacles: "According to Persian poetry, water never follows a straight line. Like a brook in a field, the essence of its flow is determined by the obstacles in its way. The obstacles force water to find its own way" ("La leçon").

For Kiarostami, location is of paramount importance and the choice of Lucignano is no accident. It is reminiscent of Iranian mountain villages, such as Koker or Siah Dareh in the northwest of the country, featured in *The Wind Will Carry Us* with their maze of *kuchehs*. In such narrow alleyways, a guide is necessary for the film character, a newcomer to the village, and for the viewer, to find their bearings. In *The Wind Will Carry Us*, Behzad finds it hard to locate the village he is looking for in the heart of the Kermanshah region in Iranian Kurdistan. The information he has, he informs us, "leads him nowhere", infuriating him in the process. When he finally reaches the village, men and women alike seem blinkered by their daily grind (collecting wood, preparing meals, doing the washing) and even the impromptu arrival of a stranger is unable to make them deviate from their routine. A young boy, Farzad, serves as a cicerone to show him the way through the intricacy of the village topography. Here we come across another constant in Kiarostami's cinema, where children feature prominently in the role of guide, go-between and amanuensis. Their nimbleness coupled with their innocence and their fundamental honesty—the fact that they are not yet marred by life—is put to good use by the film-maker within the structure of the film itself and as a point of identification for viewers "dans un moyen de [les] mettre en doute vis-à-vis de [leur] propre attente

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<sup>3</sup> All quotations from dialogues in Kiarostami's films shot in Farsi are from the referenced DVD subtitles in English.

pour [les] emmener ailleurs” (Sabouraud 233) [“in an attempt to unsettle them in their expectations and to allow them to wander off in their own directions”]. For example, when Behzad teases Farzad about the reasons for his visit to the village, saying “If you are asked why we have come here, tell them that we are looking for a treasure”, there is a parallel with the viewer’s quest as the film unfolds. In *Certified Copy*, however, the function of the guide through the labyrinth-like Lucignano, is filled by She. The character played by Juliette Binoche remains strangely nameless throughout the film, and appears as She in the credits. As Kiarostami explains: “Je voulais qu’on la regarde comme La femme, et non pas comme une femme [ . . . ]. Et ça faisait partie du devoir que je m’étais fixé de présenter cette femme pour les spectateurs et cet homme pour les spectatrices, comme un mystère impénétrable” (“Copie conforme”) [“I wanted She to be the embodiment of womanhood and not a specific woman. I wanted her to remain unfathomable for the male audience just as I wanted the mystery around the man to be impenetrable for the female audience”].

She has a teenage son, Julien, who characteristically always lags behind her, as noticed both by the viewers and Miller, who tells of his previous encounter with them (if indeed it was them), when reminiscing—in English—about a woman and her son in Florence on *Piazza della Signoria* in front of the world-famous copy of Michelangelo’s statue of David: “What fascinated me was that they never walked together. The mother was always fifty yards in front and she never waited. The boy would just stroll along at his own speed and never make any attempt to catch up.” Since Binoche’s character is clearly moved by this anecdote (she cries and comments, also in English, “Sounds quite familiar”), the viewer is entitled to think that Miller’s story refers to them, but Kiarostami never resolves the ambiguity about whether the woman and her son referred to by Miller are She and Julien, or their doubles.

Julien is the copy (a certified copy, as it were) of Amin in *Ten* (2002) who is exclusively seen sitting beside his mother as she drives her car in Tehran’s nightmarish traffic. Julien and Amin are approximately the same age, both stubborn, outspoken with their mothers and, contrary to their counterparts in the villages, have lost their innocence, as they have been hurt by the adults around them, not least by their mothers. The women have brought the children up essentially by themselves, because of the breakdown of their relationships with the fathers and they bear the brunt of their sons’ emotional turmoil and anger. The director did not name the mother characters played by Mania Akbari in *Ten* either.

If in *Ten* there seems to be a glimmer of hope that communication will prevail, at least to a degree, this is much less so in *Certified Copy*. While Amin and his mother clearly inhabit “their own little worlds” (Kiarostami, *10 on Ten*), they nevertheless share a common space symbolised by the interior of the car—another of Kiarostami’s favourite filmic devices—where their discussions take place. In *Certified Copy* the only link between Julien and his mother is a mobile phone, with which she tries to guide him through his daily activities from a distance. In addition, She willingly takes on the role of guide to Miller for the afternoon, encouraged to do so by his apparently easygoing attitude. When asked where he

would like to go, he agrees that meandering around with no goal is acceptable, that it is “fine to be intentionally aimless”. All he wants is to be driven around so that he can admire at leisure the picturesque Tuscan scenery. Her idea is very different and she chooses where to drive them. From this point onwards the film digs deeper and more obviously into the intertwined themes of art and love, the “red fleece threads” of conversation between She and Miller, where the difference between reality and fiction, truth and lies, will feature prominently.

The film’s “Lucignano”, the village where they end up, is nothing like a certified copy of the real thing. Kiarostami states that he chose Lucignano for its “charm and its small size [ . . . ] so as to prevent anybody—from himself to the viewer—from getting lost” (“Making of *Copie conforme*”), craftily adding that any of the film spectators could easily recognise the village of Lucignano if they went to Tuscany. However, the film was actually shot not only in Lucignano, as the film-maker would have us believe, but also in the neighbouring town of Cortona. In fact, *Certified Copy*’s director of cinematography, interviewed in English, reveals that “No single place was shot in its real setting. Each filmed location is oddly made up of several places. Even one room on the screen can be made up of three different ones” (Bigazzi). The film-maker’s active process of creating meaning out of such fragments is the essence of Kiarostami’s cinema, where his strong vision is coupled with the possibility of giving the viewers’ imagination free rein so that they make sense of the film for themselves. As Kiarostami remarks in relation to *Five* (2003): “I let the audience build their own film based on their experience or even their momentary need, based on an open film [ . . . ]. The audience’s perception is what I derive most pleasure from, even if it is not at all what I had imagined” (“Making of *Five*”).

The information we glean from the film, though plausible, is Kiarostami’s invention. A case in point is the painting called *Musa Polimnia*, in real life housed in Cortona, but which in the film is presented as the highlight of Lucignano’s museum. The *Musa Polimnia* is the portrait of a young Roman woman holding a lyre, found in a nearby field during excavations in the eighteenth century, although a controversy rages over its origin. Contrary to what the museum guide claims, in words chosen by Kiarostami, there is no original of this painting in Herculaneum or anywhere else, but the viewer is led to believe that the *Musa Polimnia* is a copy. The guide refers to it as “a real copy; it’s like the *Gioconda della Toscana*”. This invented story in the film serves well Kiarostami’s avowed aim of questioning the real-copy dichotomy:

Que ce soit un documentaire ou de la fiction, le tout est un grand mensonge que nous racontons au spectateur. Notre art consiste à dire ce mensonge de sorte que le spectateur le croie. [ . . . ] Le plus important, c’est que le spectateur sache que nous alignons une série de mensonges pour arriver à une vérité plus grande. Des mensonges pas réels mais vrais en quelque sorte. (Qtd. in Limosin)

[Whether in a documentary or in a feature film, everything is a big lie we tell the viewers. Our art consists in lying in such a way as the spectators will



believe it. What is vital is that the viewers know that we are showing a series of lies to reach a bigger truth. The lies are not real but in a way they lead to the truth.]

This emphasis on the revealing power of artifice, on the visionary strength of simulacrum recalls the subject of Baudrillard's philosophical essay *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), where he argues that postmodern societies are characterised by a disjunction between signs (simulacra), images (or simulation) and reality. However, contrary to Baudrillard who criticises this change as unable to carry messages or meaning, Kiarostami gleefully exploits this possibility. He allows viewers to infer, to anticipate and finally to create their own interpretations of the images they are shown. In the end, "ce qu'on finit par voir est encore plus vrai que la réalité" ("En direct") ["what you end up seeing is truer than real life"].

For example, the film's "Lucignano" features the famous shrine to marital love for which the real town is famous: couples flock to the *Tree of Life* (Albero della vita), a work of art dating back to the fifteenth century, to renew their vows. Witnessing so many couples in wedding attire upon arrival in "Lucignano", Miller asks She whether she was married in the village, but no reply is forthcoming. Later on, in the crypt, she gives a newly married couple the impression that she has been happily married to Miller for fifteen years, so that the newly-weds are keen to have their photograph taken with both of them by the *Tree of Life*. In other words, the younger pair are eager for their marriage to replicate this apparently happy union. Miller agrees reluctantly but then grumpily warns them of the problems they are likely to expect in marriage.

Beyond the obvious interest of this sequence for the purpose of the film—viewers are going to be kept wondering whether the two protagonists are in the process of starting a relationship, of breaking up, or of restoring their commitment to one another—Kiarostami must also have been attracted to the layout of the real Lucignano. The locals describe the village as a pear-shaped, medieval, walled city built to an elliptical plan, with concentric rings ("The History of Lucignano"), thereby echoing (or copying) the Iranian geography so loved by Kiarostami. He is able to draw metaphorically his own *Map of Tendre*<sup>4</sup> through the journey undertaken by his two main characters.

According to our interpretation, the characters' itinerary is shaped like a labyrinth with Kiarostami as a modern Daedalus (the legendary craftsman and artisan whose name means 'cunning worker'). The film-maker reworks the wide range of notions encompassed by the word *labyrinth* such as "the cave, the trap, the capture, death, confusion and distraction" (Ketley-Laporte and Ketley-Laporte 95). In the original labyrinth, as well as in *Certified Copy*, there are "blind walls of intricate complexity [ . . . ], appearances are all confused, and the eye is led astray by a mazy multitude of winding ways" (Ovid 175–76; bk. 8). Such a feeling of puzzlement is pervasive throughout the film. For instance, right from the begin-

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<sup>4</sup>We refer here to Madeleine de Scudéry's famous topographic allegory of the vicissitudes of love in *Clélie, histoire romaine* (1654–1660).

ning, viewers are perplexed by the connection—or disconnection—between the antiques dealer She and Miller on the one hand, and between She and the Italian translator on the other. All are gathered in a hotel seminar room to hear Miller's presentation and it looks like She has an affinity with the translator, who seems to have kept the chair next to him free for her. When She leaves the talk before the end because her son is getting bored and hungry, she scribbles a note for her neighbour, but we find out later that the intended recipient was not the translator but Miller. As a result we are left baffled, since there appeared to be no particular attraction between her and Miller.

Far from this being an incoherent lead, we feel as though we have walked willingly up a maze's blind alley and now need to retrace our steps: we realise that we have fleetingly caught sight of a scene where She and Miller were briefly chatting at the entrance to the seminar room. We did not really pay attention to it as we were led to look forward to the late arrival of the star of the show. We understand that this is a crucial scene for the coherence of the film, as it allows us to find another way forward within the labyrinth, although we do not know at this stage whether this is likely to lead to a more clear-cut path of understanding. From now on, we vow to pay attention more fully in an attempt to become more sensitive to the signs posted throughout the film. The director is conscious of this process: "Signs allow me to create a specific picture for each viewer. Speculate, viewer! I show you signs, it is up to you to guess the rest" ("La leçon"). Or again: "Most of the time the creative mind of the audience has gathered something from the film and has built something that is much more valuable than my ideas" ("Around 5"). This is reminiscent of Umberto Eco's description of a reader as someone who "croit, [ . . . ] désire, [ . . . ] souhaite, [ . . . ] espère, [ . . . ] pense quant à l'évolution des choses" (*Lector* 149) ["believes, desires, wishes, hopes, thinks about the way the narrative will unfold"].

The scene where Miller comes to the antiques shop to meet She before their trip to "Lucignano" is the next test for our ears and eyes. This scene is intriguing in that it is filmed in a chiaroscuro light, down in an underground meandering space, particularly well chosen to represent the framework in which the story will potentially develop. Miller arrives early and is bothered by the lack of light, whereupon he flicks the light switch and unexpectedly finds himself plunged into darkness. Is this anodyne or might this be a powerful metaphor for the film's final outcome? Kiarostami himself declared, "There are details in life which are trivial and insignificant but when a film-maker frames them they attract the viewers' gaze and take another value" ("La leçon"). When She finally appears, Miller welcomes her with "We have a passion in common!", but we cannot work out whether this refers to their relationship or to their interest in antiques. Now that we are used to Kiarostami's style, we experience this comment as a sign of complicity with the director and we are ready for his next signal, which takes the form of a multifaceted set frame. "I am just in the middle of all these things", Miller continues and we know this is true because he is standing between two statues in the shop. At the same time we also know that he is busy writing books about such artefacts, but

he may also be indicating that he is not available or ready to commit to anything beyond this. His body language is expressionless and he goes as far as saying “you should keep your distance. [These statues] are attractive enough but they could be bad for you. [ . . . ] They are valuable enough but. . . [ . . . ] Actually at home I prefer practical things, I only keep an antique in the house if it [ . . . ] fits with everything else I’ve got, otherwise out it goes.”

Miller’s fear of the statues’ power may echo the malign aura often attributed to other statues in literature. For instance, in Mérimée’s *The Venus of Ille*, the “wonderfully lovely” statue also has “disdain, irony, cruelty [that] could be read upon [its] face” and at its base the inscription “Cave Amantem”, which translates as “look out for yourself if she loves you” (*The Venus of Ille*), a Mérimée phrase made even more famous thanks to Bizet’s music in *Carmen*. With this in mind it is important to note the actual statues Miller is surrounded by in the shop as they give us a foreboding sense of the relationship about to develop between the protagonists. On his right, there is a Venus which resembles that described by Mérimée: “the right hand, raised as high as the breast, was turned with the palm inward [ . . . ]. The other hand was near the hip and held the drapery that covered the lower part of the body” (*The Venus of Ille*). On Miller’s left, there is the statue of a saint with a raised arm as if scolding the unabashed goddess. Moreover, between him and the saint, is a mirror in which She is reflected—one of at least five scenes in which mirrors feature in the film, as a means for Kiarostami to emphasise life’s reflections and mediated appearances. In this particular frame, two axes intersect to strengthen the associations we make between She and the goddess on the one hand and Miller and the saint on the other (unsurprisingly then, towards the end of the film She enters a church to take her bra off because she needs to breathe more freely). The viewer is led to feel that the woman’s attempt at seducing Miller is likely to be at best arduous and at worst a failure, all the more so as Miller repeatedly warns her that he has a train to catch that evening. As the characters emerge into the street, the viewer is bound to wonder how both will manage, if at all, to overcome the odds stacked against the blossoming of their relationship. This weighing of possibilities is what Eco calls the reader’s “active cooperation”. His reader wonders “about the next step of [the] story [ . . . ]. To expect means to forecast: the reader collaborates in the course of the *fabula*, making forecasts about the forthcoming state of affairs. The further states must prove or disprove his hypotheses” (*Role* 32).

A case in point is one of the crucial scenes towards the end of the film where She and Miller are in a local restaurant after they seem to get closer to one another. Shortly before they decide to go for a meal, they have come across an older French couple in the street who are introduced to us in a scene redolent of slapstick comedies: for a while we think that they might be arguing (like She and Miller, although more openly so). The man is shouting “you’re wrong” apparently to his wife standing next to him—something which does not appear unusual within a long-lasting relationship. We discover after a while that he was actually speaking to a third person on his mobile phone, which had been hidden from viewers earlier. We understand from their reaction to the statue on the fountain at the centre of the

*piazzetta*—yet another of the film’s signposts—that this couple’s relationship is in fact much less confrontational than the one the film is focusing on.

The life-size bronze statue features a strong man standing in front of a woman whose head is resting on his shoulders. For the French couple the statue simply represents the tender link between the two figures, whereas Miller and She articulate their reaction in an intellectual mode, as though they fear expressing their feelings. The older Frenchman is aware of this and advises Miller (who remains aloof like the statue of the saint in the antiques shop earlier) to connect physically with his companion: “The only thing she wants is for you to walk next to her and that you rest your hand on her shoulders [ . . . ]. Don’t make the situation more complicated than it already is. All your problems could be erased with a simple gesture. Just do it and you will become free!” This tourist is the film’s *Deus ex machina* and his frustration mirrors that of the audience which is hoping for a Hollywood-style happy ending. Surprisingly, on their way to the trattoria recommended by the tourist couple, Miller follows the advice, albeit in a hesitant manner, and for a short while we think that the relationship is improving. As they enter the restaurant She goes to the bathroom and puts on make-up. In complete contrast with her previous, natural appearance, she chooses the brightest red lipstick and opts for a pair of costume earrings from her bag. This is out of character—and rather a special feature of her sister Marie whom we remember She remarked upon in a disapproving manner at the beginning of the film that Marie “loves costume jewellery” and that for her sister, “fake jewellery is as good as the real thing”. The impression we get is that in this mirror scene, She wishes to copy her sister, possibly in the hope of replicating with Miller the loving relationship Marie enjoys with her husband, referring to him as “the simplest man on Earth.”

This master scene in the film brings together the myriad threads that viewers have been enticed to follow from the beginning. The main characters have climbed the narrow, winding alleys and reached the centre of the labyrinth in the hilly “Lucignano”, at the apex of the village. The sequence is suffused with mirrors which do not entirely reflect the real scenes; Miller may well be putting into practice what he has been told; he may be putting his arm around her shoulders; we may see the statue in a motorbike side-mirror; the older couple may look similar to them; the French woman may be sharing She’s view of the statue; She and Miller may be having dinner at the same trattoria—but none of the copies can be certified. There is always a glitch in the reproduction. Miller’s tenderness leaves much to be desired, his embrace with She being the inverse reflection of the statue on the piazzetta (where the man was leading, She is leading). Only part of the statue is visible in the motorbike side-mirror; She and Miller are very different from the older couple who are at ease with one another’s company; the French woman is unable to repeat She’s comments on the statue; She and Miller do not have a peaceful and enjoyable meal and on the contrary their power struggle is unexpectedly at its most virulent at that point. A violent argument between the two erupts such that it becomes obvious that She is not her sister’s copy nor Miller a copy of Marie’s husband.

Noticeably, when they leave the restaurant, She and Miller speak only French, whereas most of their dialogue so far has been in English, albeit interspersed with French and some Italian. Throughout the film, She speaks French with her family, English with her male counterpart and Italian with an Italian café owner, but English and Italian are learnt languages for her. The main male character is quintessentially English in his demeanour and can speak some French and some Italian. In all cases the code-switching is meaningful and usually carries a shift in either the storyline, the protagonists' emotions, or their memories which filter and enrich the scene. In French, they appear more affectionate towards one another, their voices softening as though it is easier for them to express their feelings in this language and leaving the viewer to wonder whether their relationship might be rekindled. There are indications related to Miller's personal grooming: we learned earlier in the film that he only shaves every two days, that he had not shaved on their wedding day, and now again he is unshaven. We surmise from this that the conditions have been met for a repeat of the original wedding night fifteen years ago. However, there are also signs that this might not happen—or if it does, the outcome will be different: we know by now that copies, valuable though they may be, are never exact.

Another crucial scene involving a mirror is the last scene of *Certified Copy* in a hotel bathroom overlooking the roofs of "Lucignano". We have now reached the highest point in the village and the end of the film. The hotel may be the same one where the protagonists spent their first night as a married couple. Any Kiarostami aficionado will recall similar mirror scenes in many of his previous films. They feature as early as *The Report* (1977), another work focusing on a relationship between a man and a woman, where the tax-collector combs his hair in front of a mirror, and again in *The Wind Will Carry Us* where the main protagonist Behzad meticulously shaves, although this time the mirror is no more, and the actor gazes directly into the camera. This close-up is an emblematic scene in *The Wind Will Carry Us* which leads any *Certified Copy* viewer in the know to wonder whether James will act as an avatar of Behzad and if so, what consequences this might have for the outcome of his relationship. In contrast to Behzad however, Miller strokes the stubble on his cheeks thoughtfully, washes his hands and leaves the room. Kiarostami ends *Certified Copy* with the open bathroom window, an obvious visual metaphor for the openness of the narrative which Kiarostami is so keen on: "The viewer can take part in the film process—and for a creative person this represents a challenge which is much more exciting than the trite and banal signposts that can be found in some films" (*10 on Ten*). What happens next in *Certified Copy* we never know, just as we never know if Tahereh accepted Hossein's marriage proposal in the famous last scene in *Through the Olive Trees*. Viewers have to make their own hypotheses. To quote Eco, "In order to make forecasts which can be approved by the further course of the *fabula*, the Model Reader resorts to intertextual frames. [ . . . ] To identify these frames the reader ha[s] to walk, so to speak, outside the text, in order to gather intertextual support (a quest for analogous 'topoi', themes, or motives)" (*Role* 32).

In *Certified Copy*, the most obvious “inferential walk” (Eco, *Role* 32) takes the viewer to Rossellini’s *Journey to Italy* (1954), in which Katherine and Alexander Joyce, played by Ingrid Bergman and George Sanders, are a British couple in Naples, where the crisis in their relationship becomes obvious to them. Parallels with *Certified Copy* are several: the couple is filmed while travelling around in a car; they visit Pompeii’s ruins where they witness a man and a woman being unearthed, their embrace in death still visible; Katherine also visits various Neapolitan museums. Commenting on *Journey to Italy*, the film critic Cath Clarke concludes “This is not the most conventional of romances, for sure, but one that understands like no other the complex nature of human relationships”, a remark which could just as easily apply to Kiarostami’s film.

Intertextual references abound in *Certified Copy*. Alain Resnais’ *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961) comes to mind with its nameless characters, its suggestive use of garden sculptures, and the foretelling of the protagonists’ fate in the stage play at the beginning of the film. The following comments on Resnais’ film are just as apt for Kiarostami’s:

Cinematically, it is a study of the separate reality of its own existence, eschewing the conventions of realism as being false illusion. By its own temporal discontinuity, its nameless characters and hermetically-sealed set, it demands that we accept it as reality itself rather than as a faithful and ultimately illusory representation of reality. *Marienbad* says by its construction that art is a reality added to reality and not a copy of reality. (Beltzer)

It is our view that *Certified Copy* also builds on Louis Malle’s *The Lovers* in an intricate web of *chassé-croisés*. In *The Lovers* (1958) Jeanne, her husband, her first lover Raoul and then Bernard, can be regarded as the forerunners of the couple in *Certified Copy* where the roles of the three men in the earlier film appear to coalesce within Miller, although it is impossible to discern which one he may be at any given time. There are pivotal scenes in both films which bear striking similarities. In Malle’s film, it is the husband who reproaches his wife for spending too much time in Paris, while it is the other way round in Kiarostami’s film. Jeanne expresses her disappointment with her husband at the dinner table after her return from Paris accusing him of “hardly noticing [her]” while Binoche’s character in *Certified Copy* takes every opportunity to attract Miller’s attention, including by her disappearance into the restaurant toilets. If ever there was doubt as to the correspondence, Jeanne too is shown looking at herself intently in a bedroom mirror before reappearing transformed, as the voiceover comments: “She suddenly felt like becoming someone else.” At this point Jeanne has made up her mind to run away with Bernard, the man she encountered by chance and with whom her relationship characteristically started within the confines of a car.

Kiarostami also shares Malle’s preoccupation with truth and lies, with role-playing and with the involvement of the viewer, as illustrated in *The Lovers*. Referring to her husband, Malle’s Jeanne says, “Don’t trust appearances. Henri is never like this. He’s just acting”, to which Raoul replies, “Good actors can reveal the

truth.” Jeanne retorts, “They tell lies”, while Raoul continues to disagree, “They tell the truth.” This exchange exemplifies an ambivalent attitude in the theoretical questioning of the complex relationship between art and reality, described in similar terms by Kiarostami himself:

Dans des relations fausses demeure tapie une vérité qui est plus intéressante et plus pure que ce que l’on cherche dans la réalité. C’est au cœur du mensonge que se trouve la vérité parce qu’on y est débarrassé de la réalité. Si vous acceptez l’idée que chacun est en train de jouer, de mentir, c’est là qu’il ouvre son cœur et qu’il livre sa vérité. La vérité des êtres me devient accessible quand ils sont en train de mentir. Parce que le mensonge vous met à l’abri. (Qtd. in “Le goût du reflet”)

[In films, the relationship between actors is false and yet, underlying it is a truth which is purer and more interesting than in real life. At the heart of lies is truth because the real life trimmings have been discarded. If the viewer accepts the fact that the actor is playing a role, and that he is therefore lying, that’s when the actor can lay his heart bare and deliver truth. The truth of human beings becomes accessible when they are in the process of lying because lies shield you.]

However, *Certified Copy* is anything but a copy. It is a complete work of art with its own integrity, one which creates “a sense of complicity between the public and the artist” (MacGregor 77). It displays its own specific characteristics which reveal the creative vision of the film-maker, not least in relation to its innovative structure.

*Certified Copy* is woven around the archetypal shape of the labyrinth that the essayist Marcel Brion defines as the combination of the two intertwined patterns of the spiral and the knot (*la spirale et la tresse*) which he sees as present in all cultures, with the spiral described as “ouverte et optimiste” [“open and optimistic”], whereas the knot is “une prison sans possibilité d’évasion” [“prisonlike without the hope of escape”]. In the labyrinth,

la tresse interv[ient] alors pour apporter au cheminement du voyageur ses enchevêtrements inextricables en apparence [ . . . ], alors que la spirale au contraire, lui réserve au terme d’une longue errance et d’une constante patience, le réconfort du salut. (Brion)

[the knot represents the apparently inextricable obstacles stumbled upon, whereas the spiral embodies salvation at the end of a long and winding road.]

It is their intertwining which gives the labyrinth its special significance:

Pour le voyageur qui pénètre dans le labyrinthe, le but est d’atteindre la chambre centrale, la crypte des mystères. Mais lorsqu’il l’a atteinte, il doit en sortir, et regagner le monde extérieur, [ . . . ] [dans un] processus nécessaire [de] métamorphoses d’où surgit un homme nouveau.

[For whoever enters a labyrinth, the aim is to reach the central chamber, the crypt of mystery, but once he gets there he must find a way out, and get back to the outside world as a new person, having completed a necessary process of metamorphosis.]

In *Certified Copy*, the action is circumscribed within a relatively tight perimeter: the two main protagonists journey from an underground and dark antiques shop, which can only be reached by a steep stone staircase, to an attic hotel room overlooking Lucignano's rooftops, which they access via a narrow spiral staircase after fumbling their way through various entrances. In between, they have meandered through the village, walked along small alleyways, through arches and along corridors, paused half way in symbolic dead-ends such as piazzas or cafés, or in the nooks and crannies of the museums they visit. All this is a visual metaphor for the intricacies of their interaction. Kiarostami singles out the people of the Middle East, and those of developing countries in general, as people who can only move ahead in zigzags: "It is as though zigzags reassure us in our attempt to reach our aim. While the straightest way maybe the shortest, twists and turns seem to me to represent better the essence of our way of life" ("La leçon"). *Certified Copy* makes it clear that this is more of a universal feature than one particular to one part of the world.

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